

Come Running Home to You by chooburii

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Cuddling, F/M, Fluff, Rated T for language, also for the sake of the fic the cabin has two bedrooms, eleven has nightmares and mike just wants to be with her again, it's mostly just mike and eleven and jim, post-closing the gate but pre-snow ball, sharing a blanket, the others make appearances but aren't in it much, uh what else

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-29

Updated: 2017-11-29

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:03:17

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,100

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Eleven has closed the gate to the Upside Down, but the memories still haunt her. When nightmare after nightmare causes her to lose sleep, she unconsciously turns to the one person who always understood her.

Come Running Home to You

Author's Note:

Look who's back from the dead!

I have a lot of feelings after season 2 but mostly I just want El and Mike to have some quiet time to themselves to just Be Together. This took me about two days to write and about two weeks to type out and edit, and there might be some mistakes, but I hope y'all enjoy it regardless!

edit: The title of the fic (and some of its elements) come from Running Home to You by Grant Gustin from the Flash series

Eleven wasn't afraid of the nightmares.

They were awful, absolutely; of her facing the Demogorgon, of her, trapped in the Upside Down for that fleeting, horrible moment, of her last glance at her sister, and the worse one, the one she dreaded the most, of failing to close the gate and losing the family she had just found.

She knew, as soon as she woke up, that they were just dreams, and so she wasn't afraid of them. Sure, she wished that they would occur less frequently, but she could handle the nightmares. She could handle the memories.

It was the waking up alone part that terrified her.

It was silly, she understood that. Hopper was only on the other side of the wall, but that didn't stop her from starting awake in cold sweat, frozen, tangled up in the sheets, feeling nothing but the darkness and the chilled air around her.

Eleven was scared that every time she woke up she would find herself back in the Upside Down. Back in the Void. In Papa's arms.

She was scared of the thought of losing the family she had built for

herself.

She was scared, Eleven found out one night as she stared up at the moonlit ceiling, of going to sleep.

And so she doesn't.

Instead, she just lies there, staring at the roof of her bedroom, counting the flickering thoughts running through her mind and doing her best to ignore the throes of sleep.

Her insomnia lasted for three nights before Hopper noticed something was wrong.

"Hey, kid," he said suddenly, voice thick with the remnants of sleep. Eleven looked up from across the table, her Eggos left suspiciously untouched, her eyes blinking tiredly.

"Yes?" She asked, forcing a smile onto her face.

"Are you sleeping alright?" Hopper asked, taking a large swig of his coffee without taking his eyes off of her face. He saw her flinch, smile faltering. There was a war happening in her eyes, an ongoing battle between not wanting to worry Hopper with her problem, and not wanting to break her most fundamental rule.

"You're not, are you." It wasn't a question. The battle ended. She shook her head.

"No." She whispered.

"Do you want to talk about it?" She pursed her lips. Considered. Nodded.

"Yes."

Hopper set down his coffee, pushed his plate to the side. "Alright kid," he said gently. "What's wrong?"

She wondered where to begin; the nightmares or the aloneness. She looked at Hopper, at his concerned gaze. "Nightmares," she said. "It began with nightmares."

Hopper didn't say a word the whole time she spoke. It took her awhile; Eleven still had trouble articulating her emotions, describing feelings she didn't know the words for, finding words she didn't know the meanings of. Hopper listened through it all. When she finished, he leaned back, their breakfast left forgotten and cold on the table in front of them. He ran a hand down his face, thinking.

"Let me get this straight," he said slowly. "You're having nightmares, and these nightmares cause you to wake up thinking you're back in, what, the Upside Down?" Eleven nodded. "And you think you're in the Upside Down because it's dark when you wake up?" Eleven nodded again.

"Alone." She whispered, arms wrapping around herself. "I feel alone."

"Okay," Hopper leaned forward, forcing Eleven to meet his gaze. "Okay. It's gonna be okay." He took a deep breath. "The nightmares can't hurt you. If you wake up feeling alone, just shout. I'm right here."

Eleven wanted to tell him that she knew the nightmares couldn't hurt her. It wasn't the nightmares she was scared of. But she nodded anyways. Maybe he was right. Maybe calling out for Hopper would help. Maybe company would solve it all. He saw the look in her eyes and sighed inwardly.

He hadn't convinced her.

He wasn't sure how to.

He pushed back from the table, realizing with a start that he was late for work. Eleven stood up with him, and he leant over to ruffle her hair.

"It'll be alright kid," he said, "you'll see," and when he came home that night with a soft lamp that he called a 'night-light' and promised that the dark wouldn't be so lonely with this, Eleven believed, for just a moment, that everything would be okay.

Until she realized, paralyzed, that the night-light had become the

pinprick of brightness that was the gate at the end of the hallway at Hawkins Middle; now it became the flash under the door as Papa slammed it on her face; becoming Mike in the void in their fort, far, so far away, and suddenly she was screaming, succumbing to the fear that had plagued her for so long. In the distance, Mike stood, staring at her as she screamed his name.

“Mike! Mike!” He started forward, as if to run to her, and she reached out for him, but he was gone, turning to mist and steam and nothingness, the void consuming him, and she was in the Upside Down again, but this time there was no gate, no light, no sound.

“Mike!”

Dark.

“Mike!”

Cold.

“Mike!”

Alone.

Eleven collapsed, sobbing, the darkness closing in on her, pressing, and she can’t breathe, she can’t breathe, she can’t breathe-

“Eleven, hey!” Eleven started, eyes flying open to see Hopper standing over her, worry etched into his face in stark lines. Light from the main room flooded her vision, and she takes huge, gulping breaths, hiccuping in her attempts to loosen the knife in her chest. Her legs were tangled in the sheets, her ears echoing with screams. She thought she heard Mike’s voice, calling her name, but then Hopper’s face swam back into view, his voice drowning out the echoes, and she was crying. She clung to Hopper, tears welling and spilling over in rivers and streams, a dam damn near destroyed by trauma. Hopper swung his arm around her, tucking her into his side, running his hand down her arm.

Comforting.

“I’m here kid, Eleven, I’m here,” he murmured to her, holding her

close. "You're not alone, I'm here." Eleven nodded, her breaths quieting into a milder rhythm. He kept up the soothing words for some time, letting her calm down at her own pace. Eventually, her tears shrank to merely a tickle, and she sat back, removing herself from the protection of his arms for the sake of wiping her face.

It was only when she wiped her runny nose did she notice the blood.

Hopper noticed it too. He looked at the stain on her shirt, to her face, shirt, face.

"What did you do?" He growled, voice low.

Eleven shook her head. "I...I don't know," she whispered, staring at the tiny drop of blood. "I don't remember." Hopper stood straight, staring at the direction of her covered window.

"Maybe it's just stress." He mused, but the quaver in his voice betrayed his surety. They stayed in silence for a few minutes, tense, waiting for something to happen. Eleven jumped at a rustle in the woods beyond her walls, but it was quiet afterwards, and she sighed.

Hopper let out a breath. "I'm sure it's fine," he grumbled, "But if-"

BANG BANG BANG.

Hopper's words were cut off by the loud hammering on the front door of the cabin. His hand immediately moved to where his gun would normally be, but he was in pajamas, and his gun was in his room. "Shit," he cursed, and then cursed again when Eleven swung herself out of bed, striding through the cabin to the sound. Hopper grabbed her arm by the couch, effectively ending her parade, a wild look on his face.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" He whispered, but it thundered in her ears, echoing the door. He was trying to get her behind him. "We don't know who it is or what they're doing here!" But Eleven shook her head. The door banged again.

"Mike." She said, and this time she was smiling.

"What?" Hopper asked, opening his mouth to most likely comment

on her insanity when a voice on the other side of the door called out.

“El? Chief Hopper? Are you in there? El!” It shouted, and Hopper swore, striding over to the door and swinging it open.

Mike Wheeler stood on the threshold of the cabin, his bike abandoned at the foot of the steps his black hair wildly windblown, extremely out of breath, and clutching his supercom in the hand not currently attempting to break down the large wooden door.

“Wake up the whole neighborhood, why don’t you?” Hopper growled, peering over the mop of hair into the dark forest beyond. Mike ignored the jab.

“Where’s El?” He persisted, trying to push past Hopper and into the room. The man grabbed his shoulders, keeping him still.

“Michael Wheeler, it is one in the morning. What the hell are you doing here?” He paused for a second, then looked at him closely. “How the hell did you know about this place? How did you get here? I have to take you home before your mother finds you and kills me-” He cut off, surprise forming on his tongue instead as tears began to pool at the corners of the kid’s eyes.

“I don’t care,” Mike choked out, “El needs me.” Hopper loosened his grip, and the boy stared him down, daring him to contradict. “Where is she?”

“Mike.” And then she was there, at Hopper’s side, and Hopper was letting go of his shoulders and Mike had dropped his supercom, and he was hugging her, and she was hugging him, as if the year they’d spent apart had finally caught up with them; he was crying and she was crying, and Hopper was muttering curses under his breath as he shut the front door and walked into the kitchen to grab a beer.

Eleven sobbed, a happy sob, her head buried in the space by his neck, clinging to the one person who understood her the most in the world. It took a moment, for her heart to cease its wildest thundering, to realize that he was speaking. She leaned back, just a little bit, unwilling to remove herself from the comfort of his arms.

“What?” She asked, her breathing once again calming at the way he kept a tight hold on her, rubbing circles into her shoulders as if to murmur ‘I’m here’ into her skin.

“I heard you.” He whispered, and he pulled back too. Eleven looked at him, confused.

“You heard me?” He nodded, his hair brushing her forehead.

“On my supercomm. I heard you calling my name. You were screaming.” He said, voice cracking slightly at ‘screaming.’ In the kitchen, Hopper grunted, but Mike ignored him, continuing on. “Crying. I tried calling you but you just kept crying. And then you disappeared.” El stared at him, heart pounding. He smiled at her, the heartbreakingly soft smile that conveyed so much emotion and made her blush. “You called for me El, and I came. I always will. I promise.”

El nodded, a grin of her own sneaking onto her face. “Promise.” She whispered back, leaning her head onto Mike’s shoulder again and tightening her grip on his sweater. Mike made her feel warm and safe, and as he held her there, at the entrance to the cabin, rocking gently on the balls of his feet, swaying, she felt, for the first time in a long time, that she could sleep. She closed her eyes, breathing in the scent of pine and lemongrass and fresh air clinging to Mike.

“El, are you okay?” Mike asked suddenly, pulling back once again to look at her. She started, eyes snapping open. Hopper was by their side in a flash.

“I’m fine,” She said weakly. She was so warm. “I’m just tired.” Hopper snorted.

“That’s an understatement, kid, considering you haven’t slept in three days.” Mike wheeled around to face him, Eleven stumbling as he took her with him.

“She hasn’t-” He gaped at Hopper, then at El. “You haven’t slept in three days?” El shook her head, eyes downcast. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would have come sooner!” He directed at Hopper, who grunted.

“Damn kid, I thought you were the smart one. Nobody’s supposed to know she exists yet. I can’t have you, or your friends, barging in here any day you want”

“But she’s hurting! She needs me!”

“You still can’t come here whenever you feel like it!”

“What about whenever *El* feels like it?”

“We have to be careful, kid. People can’t know who she is and *especially* where she lives!”

“So what, so I’m supposed to just ignore the fact that she’s here? Abandon her?”

“No one’s abandoning anyone. We’re just keeping an eye on things, kid, you understand. You have to be careful. What if someone saw you coming here? It’s too risky.”

El was shocked. She knew that Mike had been angry with Hopper for hiding her away for nearly a year, but the iciness in his voice now was something she had never expected from the boy who had saved her life. He was still holding her, gripping so tightly she was afraid she’d lose her breath. His next words, however, solved that problem for her.

“I’ve already lost El once. If you think I’m going to sit back and lose her again, even if it’s only for a month, or a week, or a day, then you are so damn wrong. For the rest of my life, as long as El needs me, I’ll come running to her. Always.”

The silence in the cabin felt thick enough to touch. El gazed at Mike in wonder and surprise, the nature of his declaration too similar to those she’d seen on the TV, and with sudden clarity she was left breathless. Mike, in turn, glared at Hopper, as if daring him to disagree. Hopper, for his benefit, raised his hands placatingly.

“Shit, Romeo, alright. I didn’t say you wouldn’t.” He ceded, stepping back to review the situation. His girl was still encircled in Mike’s arms, puffy eyes wide at the argument and ensuing proclamation. The boy was still watching him, care in the way he held her despite

the stark challenge in his eyes.

Clearly, he was going to have to tread this one carefully. God, Joyce would be so much better at this.

“Does anyone know where you are?” He asked Mike, who shook his head.

“El sounded like she was in so much pain,” he confessed, “I forgot to leave a note. No one followed me either, I’m sure.” He added.

“Okay,” Hopper calculated his options. One, send Mike home and have to deal with an upset teenage girl for who knows how long. Two, let Mike stay and have to deal with the two of them for at few more hours. It wasn’t really a contest. El’s happiness was worth more than having to play Bad Cop to two lovesick teenagers. “Shit, fine, you can stay.” He said, some sort of gentle emotion fluttering through him as Mike gave the barest hint of a smile and El beamed wide. “But you’re calling your mother first thing in the morning.” The boy nodded, finally relaxing his tight circle on El, but before he could say anything, Hopper interjected with one last rule.

“And you’re sleeping on the couch.”

Eleven had protested. What was wrong with sharing a bed? The bed was comfier, and besides, couples on the TV shows did it all the time! But Mike had become too red at her words to protest with her, and Hopper stood firm.

No bed-sharing.

And so Mike found himself on the moth-eaten couch, an eye on El’s door and clutching the edges of the spare blanket Hopper had given him. The moon, hidden by the plethora of curtains, cast a weak silver glow upon the room.

He couldn’t sleep. He’d never felt so alive, so energized, his body thrumming with wild energy at being so close to the girl he never thought he’d see again. After closing the gate to the Upside Down,

Hopper had driven El back to the Byers' household for a proper rest, shoos the returned kids and Steve home to their own families. She had been out of it for two days, two whole days of being forced to stay at home and pretend like everything was okay. Mike had been sick with worry, so close to Eleven, and yet so far from her. He hadn't known what was worse, not knowing if she was alive or not knowing if she would be okay. Both days after school, he would bike over with Lucas and Dustin and, surprisingly, Max, to check on El and ask about Will's condition in the hospital. Both days, Joyce would open the door and smile weakly and tell him that she hadn't woken up yet and not to disturb her and that Will was doing fine and that she would let them know when they were alright. Mike was restless. Even sitting with Eleven wasn't allowed. He had had about thirty minutes with her in almost a year, and he was losing his mind.

And then, on the third day, he and the others had opened the door to Will, who looked thin and weak and sported red marks on his body, but who was smiling so joyously at seeing his friends again. It took a few minutes, after hugs were exchanged and exclamations of "holy shit, guys!" were said, for Mike to realize that Joyce was sitting at the dining table, her hands folded, her eyes downcast.

"I'm sorry," She had said when Mike had walked over to her, and for one terrifying moment, he had feared the worst.

"Is she-" He'd asked tentatively, unable to finish the sentence, and Joyce had gasped and shook her head and flailed her hands, catching Mike's clenched fists.

"Oh, no, sweetie, she's fine, I'm sorry, Hopper just took her home, but she's fine, she's awake, she's tired of course, but-" But Mike had stopped listening. He'd sunk into relief at Eleven's confirmed safety, but part of Joyce's comforting words had burned him instead.

"She's gone?" He'd interrupted.

"No, not forever," Joyce had tried to say, but Mike cut her off again.

"Can you take me to her?"

Joyce had just looked at him, the remorse on her face clear but Mike

had been too busy burning to try and understand. "I'm so sorry, Mike, but Hopper-"

"I don't care what Hopper thinks!" Mike had shouted, almost regretting it as Joyce flinched, her hands over her mouth.

Almost.

"Listen, I won't....I won't go and see her. I understand, she needs to stay hidden, but, *please*, Mrs. Byers, just tell me where she is. I need to know."

"I-I don't know, Hopper, he was adamant, you see-"

"I'll tell you." Mike and Joyce had whipped around as Jonathan appeared in the doorway. He leaned against it, arms crossed and eyebrows raised. Will, Lucas, Dustin, and Max had stopped their conversations, sitting in a circle on the floor behind Jonathan and pretending to not be eavesdropping. Jonathan had seemed to be having a silent showdown with his mother, and after a moment of glaring he sighed and stepped forward. "Look, if it was Will in that cabin instead of Eleven, you would be in the same position as Mike." Joyce had hugged herself, her mouth closing tight. "Knowing where she is, even if he can't see her, well, it's bound to be much more preferable to wondering if he'll ever see her again."

Mike had let out a breath, his eyes pleading with Joyce. "I can't lose her. Not again."

And she'd nodded.

He'd been true to his word, however much it pained him to be. The past week had been torture, knowing exactly where she was but knowing it was dangerous to go visit her. Jonathan had been right though. She was okay. There was some comfort in knowing that she was out there, alive and safe, and not just a crackle of the supercomm at the end of a long day. He could see her soon. He was determined to keep his silent promise.

Until she was screaming for him, and all promises flew out the window.

“Mike?” El murmured, and it took him a moment to realize that the El in front of him was real. He hadn’t even noticed her leaving her room, so caught up in his thoughts.

“El, what’s wrong?” He asked, sitting up, the blanket falling down around him. El sat next to him, tucking her legs underneath her. Mike tried to ignore the fact that their knees were touching.

“No bed-sharing.” She whispered, staring at him. Her eyes were puffy with lack of sleep, and something inside of him shattered.

“Yeah, we can’t share the bed. Hopper will kill me.” He smiled ruefully, wanting nothing more than to touch her again. “You should go back to sleep El. You’ll feel better.” But she shook her head, scooting imperceptibly closer. Mike understood, somehow, and shifted his legs so that El could fit in the space between his knees and the back of the couch. He caved, and took her hands, rubbing his thumbs over hers, and she sighed, eyes drooping closed. They stayed like that, in their own private moment, reveling in the quietness and contentment, and then El leaned in, opening her eyes to stare into his.

“No bed-sharing,” she repeated, and Mike suddenly had an inkling of where this was going. She continued, her cheeks starting to redden. “He didn’t....he didn’t say no couch-sharing.” And her gaze was so worried, so unsure of Mike’s response; he just pulled her in, wrapping his arms tight around her, her curls tickling his cheek as she tucked her head back into his neck like it belonged there. Her arms found their own way around him, and he could feel the tension melt out of her. He stroked her back, soaking in just *being* with her.

“Mike?” She mumbled into his sweater. He hummed in response, and she lifted her head, their noses almost touching, their gazes linking. She looked so beautiful in the faded moonlight, Mike realized, his heart thudding. El’s nose brushed his. “Thank you.” she said, the depth of her feelings clear in her brown eyes, and Mike was taken aback at the sincerity in her voice. “For being here. For making me not alone.”

He leaned forward, leaning his forehead gently against hers. He could drown in her eyes, in her voice, in every part of her. He would drown

in her everyday, if he could. A quiet part of him wondered if she felt this feeling just as deeply as he did. "I will always be here, El." He whispered back. "I can't say what the future will hold, but I will be here, every minute. I promise." A small part of him, as she fluttered her eyes closed and leaned in, questioned if he could ever bear to be apart from her again.

And when they kissed, soft lips touching oh, so gently, he knew with horrifying certainty that he would burn through the whole of the Upside Down a hundred times over if it meant she would be safe.

They pulled back, sharing breaths for a moment or a year or a lifetime before El ducked her head back into Mike's shoulder. He shifted himself over slightly, giving her room to stretch out, pulling the blanket over both of them before settling down, her head on his chest, her hands resting around him. She breathed in, letting the warmth of his hands on her back and his steady heartbeat lull her sleep.

Hopper found them like that the next morning, tangled up in each other's arms. He wanted nothing more than to tease them mercilessly about finding the loophole in his rule, but one look at El's small form, so relaxed against Mike, a tiny smile gracing her features, and he decided against it. Let her have her sleep, he thought, pulling the blanket further up over the two of them and going to grab himself a coffee.

El, for the first time in a long time, did not dream of monsters, nor of darkness or of the cold. She dreamt of sweaters, and moonlight and the scent of pine.

And when she woke up, she was not alone.

Author's Note:

this work is alternatively titled: another couch-

sharing fic? Really? Aren't there like 100 already?
Also Hopper secretly respects the hell out of Mike for being so considerate of his little girl and they're going to get along swimmingly once Mike gets over that small detail of Hop hiding El from him for almost a year.

fun fact, El says Mike's name 9 times in this fic.

I have a bunch more ideas about fics set in the Stranger Things Universe, so stay tuned. Like actually. I'll be back. For real this time.

For more small ficlets and other Stranger Things related stuff, you can find me on tumblr at "upsideownpromises"